

Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Department of Telecommunications and Energy

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|                                     | ) |               |
| Service Quality Guidelines for      | ) |               |
| Electric Distribution Companies and | ) | D.T.E. 04-116 |
| Local Gas Distribution Companies    | ) |               |
|                                     | ) |               |

**Reply Comments of the  
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 103**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 103 ("IBEW Local 103") appreciates the opportunity to submit these Reply Comments regarding service quality standards to the Department of Telecommunications and Energy (the "Department").

In our Initial Comments, IBEW Local 103 urged the Department to enhance the provisions of the service quality guidelines that address public and worker safety. We suggested that safety is a critical component of service quality, but one that is not adequately addressed by the existing service quality guidelines. As evidence of the need for greater attention to safety, we described seven recent manhole explosions, one of which sent a 189-pound manhole cover flying into the air and through the windshield of a passing car, critically injuring an 18-year-old boy. We explained that a skilled workforce is essential to the safety of the distribution system. We pointed out that there are currently no standards in place for the training of electrical contractors working on the underground

system,<sup>1</sup> and recommended that the Department add an electrical contractor training requirement to the service quality standards.

In these Reply Comments, we will update the Department regarding two significant safety related incidents that occurred in the month since the initial comments were filed. We will also respond to comments of other parties regarding the need for service quality benchmarks to reflect reasonable customer expectations and regarding the effect of SQ benchmarks on utility operations.

## **II. CONTINUING SAFETY INCIDENTS: AN ELECTROCUTION AND AN EXPLOSION.**

In the one month since the initial comments were filed, there have been two additional safety-related incidents: a dog was electrocuted by stray voltage and another manhole exploded.

On March 1, 2005, the day the initial comments were filed in this service quality proceeding, a dog was electrocuted by stray voltage in Allston while his 13-year old owner watched (*Stray NSTAR Wires Kill Dog in Allston*, The Boston Globe, March 2, 2005; *Boy's Dog Electrocuted Near Brighton Manhole*, Boston Herald, March 2, 2005).

On March 11, 2005, an electrical cable failed, causing a manhole to explode in Cambridge. According to press reports, the blast sent a manhole

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<sup>1</sup> There are currently no training standards in place because the distribution companies assert that they are free to hire unlicensed electricians to work on the underground system. It is the position of IBEW Local 103 that Massachusetts law requires that outside electrical contractors be licensed. Section seven of Chapter 141 of the General Laws exempts utility employees from licensure requirements. However, that exemption does not extend to contractors. There is a solid rationale for exempting utility employees from licensure requirements: utilities have traditionally provided extensive training programs for their employees. However, that rationale does not extend to outside contractors, many of whom have little or no formal training. IBEW Local 103 does not ask the Department to rule on whether licensure is required for outside contractors. We ask only that the Department recognize that by eschewing licensing requirements the distribution companies are also eschewing the training requirements that go along with licensure.

cover 5 feet into the air. A nearby fire station and YMCA housing a day care center were evacuated (*Electrical Cable Blast Forces Evacuations, The Boston Globe*, March 12, 2005; *Electrical Cable Failure Causes Manhole Covers to Blow Out*, Boston Herald, March 12, 2005).

These incidents, like the seven manhole explosions discussed in our Initial Comments, point out the need to incorporate strong safety provisions in the service quality standards.

### **III. SERVICE QUALITY STANDARDS SHOULD REFLECT CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS. CUSTOMERS DO NOT EXPECT EXPLOSIONS AND ELECTROCUTIONS.**

A number of commenters suggested that service quality standards should reflect customer expectations of service. For example, Associated Industries of Massachusetts recommended that “benchmarks should reflect reasonable customer expectations” (Initial Comments of Associated Industries of Massachusetts, at 1 – 2 (March 1, 2005)). Similarly, Massachusetts Electric Company suggested that “SQ plans are most effective when the resulting performance measures are based on controllable outputs and relate to customers’ service expectations” (Comments of Massachusetts Electric Company and Nantucket Electric Company, at 2 (March 1, 2005)).

IBEW Local 103 agrees that customer expectations are a reasonable benchmark to use when setting service quality standards.

We submit that a core customer expectation is safety. Whatever their opinion about the level of service provided by their electric distribution company, customers expect that at least the company will not endanger them. Customers

expect, and have the right to expect, that manhole covers will not fly through the air and that pets will not be electrocuted when walking on city streets.<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, for the service quality standards to reflect customer expectations of service, those standards must include strong safety provisions.

**IV. IT IS IMPORTANT TO INCLUDE SAFETY-RELATED MEASURES IN THE SERVICE QUALITY STANDARDS BECAUSE THOSE STANDARDS DRIVE COMPANY PERFORMANCE.**

In our Initial Comments, we suggested that it was critically important to include safety-related measures in the service quality plan because the service quality plan drives company performance. In essence, service quality standards work: they drive the companies to focus on those measures included in the standards and, conversely, can lead the companies to place less emphasis on areas not included in the standards.

In support of this proposition, we cited distribution company testimony from the legislative hearing on manhole explosions. That testimony explained that the intense focus on outages in the current service quality standards had led the companies to track outages in excruciating detail (a database of all outages affecting two or more customers for more than one minute). However, because the service quality standards did not address explosions, the companies did not track those incidents (Initial Comments of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 103, at 7 – 8 (March 1, 2005)).

The NSTAR Companies, in their Initial Comments, provided further evidence of the importance of service quality standards. The NSTAR Companies

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<sup>2</sup> IBEW Local 103 has not conducted a statistically valid survey regarding customer expectations. However, we suggest that such a survey is not needed to determine that customers have this minimum level of expectation.

explained that, in addition to being used by the Department to assess NSTAR's performance, the standards are used by NSTAR to set internal goals and assess employee performance.

[M]any companies have used the service-quality requirements to set internal goals for improved company performance. Many companies including NSTAR have established new internal departments to measure, track and report service-quality performance statistics. Service-quality targets are known throughout NSTAR and are used to communicate to all employees, and are used annually in assessing company and management performance.

Initial Comments of Boston Edison Company, Cambridge Electric Light Company, Commonwealth Electric Company, and NSTAR Gas Company, at 12 (March 1, 2005).

Safety is the touchstone of utility performance. Given that utilities will strive to excel at whatever is covered by the service quality standards, safety should be the central feature of those standards.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

IBEW, Local 103 respectfully requests the Department modify its service quality guidelines in accordance with the recommendations set forth herein and in our Initial Comments. In particular, we recommend that the Department add an electrical contractor training requirement to the service quality standards.

Respectfully submitted,

INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF  
ELECTRICAL WORKERS, LOCAL 103

By its attorney,

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